

## The Persecution of the Church 23

could be clearer. It is the old official defence of the State religion, that men are not wiser than their fathers, and that innovation in worship is likely to bring down the wrath of the gods. Moreover, as the edict points out, this Manicluenism came from Persia, the traditional enemy of Rome, and threatened to corrupt the "modest and tranquil Roman people " with the detestable manners and infamous laws of the Orient. " Modest and tranquil " are not the epithets which posterity has chosen to apply to the Roman people of the Empire, but Diocletian\*.\*? point is obvious. Manielueanism was a device of the enemy ; it must be poison, therefore, to the good Roman. Such an argument was born of prejudice rather than of reason ; we shall see it applied yet again to the Christians, and applied even by the Christian Church to its own schismatics and heretics, It was during the winter of 302 that the question was carefully debated by Diocletian and Galenas — the latter was staying with the senior Augustus at Nicomedia —whether it was advisable to take repressive measures against the Christians. According to Lactantius, Galenas clamoured for blood, while Diocletian represented how mischievous it would be to throw the whole world into a ferment, and how the Christians were wont to welcome martyrdom, he argued, therefore, that it would be quite enough if they purged the court and the army. Then, as neither would give way, a Council was called, which sided with Galerius rather than with Diocletian, and it was decided to consult, the oracle\* of Apollo at Miletus. Apollo returned the string?